

# Belgium considers giving children right to choose euthanasia

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Belgium, where euthanasia is already legal for adults over 18 years of age, wants to extend the option to children. If the controversial bill is successful, it will become the first country to grant minors the right to die.

The decision would only be legal with parental consent. The country also hopes to give patients with early dementia the same right. The legislation was proposed

by the ruling Socialist party. The final decision requires the approval of parliament, which could take months.

The bill is facing domestic opposition from the Christian Democratic and Flemish party, which stated that it will take the new proposal to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary, AP reported.

The EU country is already leading the way in the heavily debated issue, as it legalized the practice for adults in 2002. Since the legalization, the number of reported cases of euthanasia has jumped from a couple hundred to over 1,400 per year.

The debate over euthanasia is a global one; the practice is legal in only a few countries. The Netherlands allows it for adults and children over the age of 12, but in very specific circumstances. Assisted suicide is also legal in Luxembourg. In Switzerland, a doctor is allowed to help end a patient's life, but is not permitted to actually do so.

The US state of Oregon also legalized assisted suicide for people over the age of 18 who have a terminal illness. Washington, Vermont, and Montana have similar rules.

Some argue that children are incapable of making responsible decisions when it comes to euthanasia.

Catholic Archbishop Andre-Joseph Leonard told the Belgium Senate: *"It is strange that minors are considered legally incompetent in key areas, such as getting married, but might [be able] to decide to die."*

Charles Fostr, professor of law and ethics at Oxford University, told AP that *"it often happens that when people get into the circumstances they had so feared earlier, they manage to cling on all the more...Children, like everyone else, may not be able to anticipate how much they will value their lives if they were not killed."*